

FRONTLINE  
"Looking for Mao"  
Drasnin  
4/18/83

TEASE

Tonight on FRONTLINE, a journey through China that ten years ago you wouldn't have thought possible...in search of one of this century's most legendary and dominating leaders, and the revolution he left behind.

What's happening in China, six years after the death of Mao Zedong, may be one of the biggest surprises of this century.

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... Looking for Mao.

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Drasnin: A November morning in Peking at the Monument to Revolutionary Heroes, six years after the death of Mao Zedong.

Here, in the vast square of the Chinese capital forms a silent procession...stirring images familiar, yet obscure, to outsiders.

For millions of Chinese, it's an occasion to stir the memory.

(SOF: 9th Party Congress)

Mao died in 1976 at the age of eighty-one, after years of sometimes torturous twists and turns in Chinese life...and ten years of upheaval known as the Cultural Revolution.

The Cultural Revolution isn't Mao's only legacy, but it's the one on the minds of most Chinese.

(SOF: 9th Party Congress)

When Mao died, a torn and divided Communist Party debated what to do with his body. It built this mausoleum.

Today, the leadership's concern is what to do with Mao's spirit...the legacy of Maoism, which reached a crescendo in 1969 at the Ninth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party.

(SOF: 9th Party Congress)

This official Chinese film of that event may now be buried deep in some Peking archive, but it remains close to the surface of Chinese life.

Narrator, film of 9th Party Congress: "The Ninth National Congress of the Communist Party of China is convened at a time when great victory has been won in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, personally initiated and led

by Chairman Mao."

Drasnin: In this century, no leader has so stirred the blood of so many. But in this celebration of Mao, there was a hidden struggle among China's leaders...over how to fulfill the promise of the revolution.

Only ten years ago, many in the world saw in China the promise of Mao's utopian vision: social and economic equality motivated not by self-interest but by self-sacrifice.

But for many Chinese, it was an equality of the poor...in a poor country that was isolated, almost alone in the world.

Mao wanted to change not only how people live but how they think. The world saw this, and didn't know what to think: a frenzy that often turned violent...all political and cultural expression defined in the pages of Mao's Little Red Book...in the hands of millions of

devoted youth, the Red Guards.

Mao declared his way the road to socialism, and accused his opponents of taking the road to capitalism. But his declarations of victory were premature.

Lin Biao, Mao's designated successor, is dead.

Jiang Jing, Mao's wife and her supporters -- the Gang of Four -- are in prison.

But take a good look: seeing and hearing this China of the 1960's and 70's, it's impossible to imagine the China of the 1980's...the China you are about to see.

Narrator, film of 9th Party Congress:

"Let the whole party unite, let the people of the whole country unite, hold high the great red banner of Mao Zedong thought. Be resolute, fear no sacrifice, and surmount every diffi-

culty to win victory."

Drasnin: Mao and Maoism, seemed a permanent monument...carved in stone.

But amid the fury of the Cultural Revolution, there was a stillness, of the mind...of voices that until recently could not be heard.

Drasnin: Why do you think there was a Cultural Revolution?

Student: Oh this is very complicated.

Student: I think Chairman Mao thought there were capitalist roaders in every leading position and they - and he wanted all these people be out.

Student: To be got rid of.

Student: And at that time we believed

him. I worked with other students to build this statue.

Drasnin: This statue of Chairman Mao.

Student: Yah, Yah. We worked there. Bad time for us, you see.

Drasnin: In the glorification of Mao, there was a silence...a conformity of the arts, in literature, drama and music.

Looking for Mao, we still found the old images and slogans -- fading beneath the messages of a new leadership. But the silence has been broken.

(SOF: Brahms)

Student: I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of it's creed. We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created

equal. I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia...

Drasnin: For students in Peking, many of whom couldn't have gone to college because their parents -- professionals and intellectuals --were among the chief targets of the Cultural Revolution...there could be a hidden meaning here.

Student: ...will live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. I have a dream today.

Drasnin: Martin Luther King spoke about his dreams for America.

Student: Yeah.

Drasnin: What are your dreams for China? What dreams do you have here in your country?

Student: The four modernizations.

(LAUGHTER)

Drasnin: What does the four modernizations mean, to you?

Student: Scientific . . .

Drasnin: No, not just the categories. In terms of your lives, what does that mean for you?

Student: Freedom. Everybody is equal under the law

Students (Sing): "We shall overcome/We shall overcome/We shall overcome some day/Oh deep in my heart/ I do believe/We shall overcome some day/The truth will make us free/The truth will make us free/The truth will make us free some day/Oh, deep in my heart/I do believe/ We shall overcome some day.//We shall overcome/We shall overcome/We shall overcome

some day/Oh, deep in my heart/I do believe/We shall overcome some day."

Drasnin: We went to China looking for Mao, looking for change...starting here, at The Gate of Heavenly Peace, where Mao once stood to review the Red Guards...perhaps reliving his own youth.

Now, as before, Chinese insist they're taking the road to socialism. Now, as before, there are limits in Chinese life...and to what foreigners can see of it. But there's also change.

There's no telling what Mao would think if he could see China today.

(SOF: Picture-Taking)

Not fifty yards away, just behind Mao's portrait and just outside the entrance to the Forbidden City...Chinese tourists are posing

for these portraits.

(SOF: Picture Taking)

Whether riding the dragons of some dynasty past...or posing in the family car that's yet to be, ideological limits don't apply to dreams or to who may have them.

But there's more than symbolism here, especially for young Chinese -- the two-thirds of the population under 35 -- whose dreams include a new direction for the revolution.

Student: I think the emphasis of our social life is changed. That means we put more emphasis on economic development, and people all like that, including me.

Drasnin: What does that mean to you?

Student: That means we all have better living conditions and the country will be

flourishing.

Drasnin: Among these students of journalism and English in Shanghai, there's hope and renewed expectations. There's also the shadow of past disappointment.

Student: During the Cultural Revolution -yah - you see I'm from an intellectual family. My mother is a doctor, my father is a teacher and we have, I have two brothers, two sisters. Four of us were sent to the countryside to work as peasants, and I couldn't finish my university study here and was sent to work on a farm. I hate that. That's a terrible time.

Drasnin: What about today? How important is politics today?

Student: Now, I think everybody feels freer to speak. That is a very big change, I think.

Drasnin: Peking University is where the first student banners were raised in support of Mao's Cultural Revolution...a time when almost anything foreign, down to the cut of one's hair, or clothes, was vilified. No longer.

Student: Lifestyle has changed a bit as well. People are wearing more colorful clothes, like this jacket. During the Cultural Revolution, you just couldn't see such things but now I think most students have very colorful clothes -- even in winter. This is not very good, don't look at this, but ... you know. And hairstyle as well for girls and high-heeled shoes I think many people are wearing. So it's one aspect of change, as well.

(SOF: Lifestyle, consumerism w/music)

Drasnin: Look for Mao at one of Peking's busiest corners and you'll find this billboard: "Long Live Marxism, Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought."

Cross the street...and you'll find signs of another campaign, the hard-sell not of communism but of consumerism: a sixth-century, Tang Dynasty hero of Chinese mythology -- The Monkey King -- leaping from a Japanese television set.

Today in China, consumerism is no myth. As one Chinese told us: revolution should make you rich, not poor.

The same can be said for the media, where today you can see Western films like "Evil Under The Sun", or "Tess", or any number of Chinese films.

There's a revival of movies, and of movie stars. Along with model workers, there are models... in fashion and in film. This Peking actress is posing for the latest in China's media revolution: movie posters and magazines.

Drasnin: "This magazine is interesting?"

Young Man: "Yes, it's very interesting."

Drasnin: "Why is it interesting?"

Young Man: "Modern clothes."

Drasnin: "Because it is modern clothes?"

Young Man: "Uh hum. Yes."

Drasnin: "Do you like modern clothes?"

Young Man: "Yes, I like it."

Drasnin: What is in the books, what is in the films that wasn't there before?

Student: Love, for instance.

Student: This theme of love is certainly absent. Yes, you see, if you watch Peking Opera, say six years ago, or even longer, you only see a woman who doesn't have a husband.

Student: A woman warrior.

Student: Or you know, a man who doesn't have a wife. No family life was portrayed whatsoever and also I think in television plays we ... we've seen quite a few on the topic of family life, like marriage, you know, what is the basis of marriage, because in the Cultural Revolution many people were just put together because they had to, circumstances made them become husband and wife but there was no love really between them.

Drasnin: Do you plan to get married?

Student: I'm married.

Drasnin: You are married? And for what reason did you marry?

Student: Oh, for love. (Laughter)

Student: I'm talking about some people.

Drasnin: Love may be conquering politics but there's still a party line in China, that's more flexible now. The line here is for Western books, of science and of science-fiction ..from Star Wars to The Winds of War.

Looking for Mao in this bookstore in Chongqing, you have to ask directions. Where Mao's works once crowded the shelves, now they are few...and attract no crowds.

But there are Chinese writers who do attract crowds. The hottest ticket in Peking is for a controversial play that's sold out every performance.

The play -- "These Troublesome Fellows" --takes a satirical but hard look at contemporary life-styles and at political styles of the Cultural Revolution.

In the cast of characters is a party official named "the dragon lady"...an ingenue

who informs on her co-workers, very much like a Red Guard... a heroine with sex-appeal...a hero more concerned with life-style than work-style.

It's a radical departure from Mao's radical politics, a recognition that the state's goals may only be attained if, somehow, personal goals can also be satisfied.

The playwright -- Zhong Jieying -- is also a novelist, a musician, a mechanical engineer. During the Cultural Revolution, he repaired trucks.

Zhong, The Playwright, Many of Mao Zedong's theories on art and literature are still basically correct. But in his later years, Chairman Mao became rather rigid in his thinking. He went to the extreme of placing too much emphasis on class struggle, on serving politics, thus forcing art onto a very narrow path.

During the Cultural Revolution, we were allowed to perform only eight model plays. No one hundred flowers blooming! Only one single flower was left, And not a fresh flower at that --but a plastic flower! A fake flower!

Drasnin: If there's more diversity now, there's also discouragement --and periodic warnings -- for those who step over the party line.

Off-stage, American screenplays are among China's favorite reading...including Kramer Versus Kramer, and Reds.

But just two years ago, in 1981, it was a well-known Chinese screenwriter -- Bai Hua -- who crossed the line. His script, called "Unrequited Love", was kept out of the theaters.

It's the story of a patriotic Chinese, hounded to death during the Cultural Revo-

lution, whose daughter asks him: "You love your country, but does your country love you?"

Bai Hua was criticized for attacking the party, if not socialism...taken by some as the signal for a new crackdown on the arts. But some Chinese writers hope it's different this time.

Ding Ling: As for Bai Hua, actually the episode wasn't that important. No one beat him up. He wasn't humiliated. The only thing criticized was his screenplay, not him personally. If anyone were even to touch Bai Hua, other writers would have nothing to do with even the criticism, even if they agreed with it. People would say: 'What, beating-up people again'?

Drasnin: The arts and literature have always been a barometer of China's political climate... even for veteran communist writers like the novelist, Ding Ling.

Born in Hunan Province, thirty miles from Mao's home...she joined Mao and the Communist Party fifty years ago.

That didn't prevent her from spending the twenty years until 1978 as a political exile in her own country -- five of those years in prison. She'd like to believe it couldn't happen again.

Ding Ling: Be assured that such movements will not come up again. Besides telling you, I have to reassure myself, that those terrible events are all past. What do I have to fear? Write what you want to write, say what you want to say. There's nothing to be afraid of anymore. That's what I tell myself.

Politics can help or harm, it depends. The Gang of Four also spoke in the name of politics, which meant we had to serve their version of politics. But we couldn't do that. Politics is politics, and art is art. To serve

politics alone could easily reduce art to the level of propaganda.

(SOF: Brahms)

Drasnin: Mao had said revolution was not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture...but it had become that, too.

He might have included music, in a country five times the size of America, in which only eight approved ballets and operas could be performed.

Chen Xieyang had helped to write one of them.

Chen, the Conductor: A lot's been imported from abroad. Some classical music, like Brahms and Beethoven. Some popular songs, like Hong Kong sound. Even some jazz. Some might like pop music or love songs. There's nothing wrong with it. No big deal.

(SOF: Music)

Western music was considered by The Gang of Four to be bad stuff -- not to be performed. Of course, I felt that was terribly wrong. These are treasures not only of the German or French people but of all people. The Chinese people are just as entitled to hear them. In 1979, when we could again perform this music, I was thrilled. We quickly put together a concert, including compositions by Beethoven and Tchaikovsky. I found the music even more beautiful than before.

(SOF: Music)

Drasnin: Is there a danger that this music that we now hear in China will again become impossible to play?

Chen, the Conductor: I don't think so. The Chinese people have suffered long enough. We've learned our lesson. I don't think so. I

certainly hope not

(SOF: Conductor & Orchestra)

Drasnin: The 43-year-old conductor of the Shanghai Ballet Orchestra, rehearsing the fourth movement of Brahms's 2nd Symphony: nothing extraordinary, perhaps...except that while Mao was still alive, it wouldn't have been possible.

(SOF: Orchestra & Conductor)

(SOF: Church & Choir)

Today's music in China might also be at Mass, at Shanghai's Nore Dame Cathedral ...three weeks before Christmas.

(SOF: The Church Choir)

Three years ago, this was a warehouse for dried foods...the priests assigned to making umbrella handles.

Religion -- Christian, Buddhist, Moslem -- is back, within limits. The Catholic Church can exist, as long as it answers to Peking... not to the Pope.

Father Lien: The Pope has always discriminated against the Church in China. Chinese couldn't become cardinals. In France, they have their own cardinals. In Italy, they have their own cardinals. You wouldn't have a Chinese cardinal in Italy. Chinese Catholics, for three-hundred years, have never had any control. Now, we've gained control.

Drasnin: The place of the Catholic Church in Chinese life also underlines one of China's biggest problems: its population, now officially over one-billion people.

Mao had said the more people the better. Today, birth control...abortion...and one-child families are state policy. That means it's church policy, too.